

Précis of Chapters

The following précis by the chapters' authors gives an overview of their contributions.

1. **Cupitt, the Church, and the End of the World.** Stephen Mitchell explains that, in the contemporary reception of Cupitt's work, critics and supporters alike failed to recognize that his primary concern was that Christian ethics demanded freedom from an objective God. He argues that, even now, the church can confirm this and provide moral leadership amid a climate catastrophe that threatens the end of human life on Earth.
2. **The Heroic Asceticism of Don Cupitt.** In this chapter, Linda Woodhead draws attention to the asceticism — severe self-discipline — that is central to Cupitt's life and work and which involves following critical reason honestly wherever it leads, whatever the cost, whatever the suffering. She considers not only Cupitt's writings but also his persona in *The Sea of Faith* television series (1984a), as well as in personal recollections. Drawing on Max Weber, she explains the fundamental difference between an ascetic approach and a mystical one, and shows why Cupitt takes the former rather than the latter, despite his interest in mysticism. She suggests that his mysticism, such as it is, is an ascetic mysticism rather than a mysticism in which self and divine merge or blend. It is the heroic surrender of reason to the evidence of a Godless universe, and of self in solar outpouring, that is at the heart of Cupitt's ethic and theology.
3. **Cupitt, Language, and the Mystical Everyday.** Andy Kemp explores Cupitt's fascination with mysticism. In *Mysticism after Modernity* (1998), Cupitt proposed a

thoroughgoing reinterpretation of mystical writings as radical, deconstructive, and theological. He also took issue with theologians' treatment of medieval and early modern mysticism in the late modern and postmodern eras. This chapter rehearses the key elements of Cupitt's engagement with mysticism and its implications for ethics-based religion. It examines the later conflicting claims made for Cupitt's own spirituality: whether he was a mystic or an ascetic in thought and practice. It also applies Cupitt's critique to a sample of postmodern mystic-related art. It ends by tentatively placing Cupitt's 'mysticism of secondariness' as enabling ecstatic immanence through ethical ritual practice.

4. **Give Us This Day Our Daily God.** Christo Lombaard considers Cupitt's book *The New Religion of Life in Everyday Speech* (1999), in which Cupitt identifies that, in his lifetime, the word "God" has been replaced by the term "life" in a wide range of expressions. Cupitt attributes this to a cultural shift. Cupitt saw this as reflecting his own non-realist theological orientation, which fits well with the then-dominant postmodernism. However, what he identified was not a move towards that kind of atheism, but towards a wisdom-theological societal orientation, in which, similar to traditional wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible, God is not explicitly mentioned, precisely because of the ever-implied nearness of the divine.
5. **A Solar Dharma.** Stephen Batchelor explores Don Cupitt's relationship with Buddhism as well as his own relationship with Cupitt and his writings over the past 30 years. He examines the role of Buddhism in Cupitt's philosophy and the influence of Cupitt's work on his own development of a "Secular Buddhism". He maintains that metaphysical realism is just as prevalent in Buddhism as in theistic faiths and that Buddhism needs as much of

an overhaul as Christianity if it is to address effectively the global crises facing humankind today. Batchelor focuses on four of Cupitt's books: *The Time Being* (1992), *Solar Ethics* (1995a), *Emptiness and Brightness* (2001a), and *Ethics in the Last Days of Humanity* (2016), and proposes a rethinking of Buddhism along the lines of Cupitt's *Solar Ethics*, which might eventually give rise to a Solar Dharma.

6. **Critical Spirituality.** Paul Overend examines Don Cupitt's reimagining of spirituality in a secular age. Following Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation of the Death of God and the illusion of the Self, Cupitt develops an ethic and spirituality without metaphysical foundations, aimed at living well. The chapter explores the lifestyle spirituality in Cupitt's ethics through four themes: as a philosophical way of life unbound by doctrinal belief; as a process of self-formation, drawing on Michel Foucault's account of the "care of the self"; as a way to happiness, grounded not in transcendence but in the immanent beauty and vitality of existence; and finally and fundamentally, as a discipline of critical thinking, which is necessary for political life. The chapter argues that spirituality is a vital part of Cupitt's ethic of both self-creation and world-creation.
7. **Don Cupitt and Etty Hillesum.** Philip Knight draws attention to the writings of Etty Hillesum (1914–43). Cupitt often referred to her, presenting her as someone who exemplifies his solar ethics. In the most extreme circumstance one can imagine, as a Jew living under Nazi occupation in Amsterdam and in the concentration camp at Westerbork, Hillesum continued to live a solar life. She demonstrates both that a solar life is possible and how we might live solar lives ourselves. Knight highlights notable philosophical affinities between her writings and those of Cupitt and focuses on four aspects of solar living that her

life exemplifies. He suggests that dialogue between her writings and Cupitt's can clarify themes in Cupitt's later work.

8. **Don Cupitt and China.** Zhicheng Wang and Caihong Zhu explore the cross-cultural interaction between Don Cupitt's postmodern philosophy of religion and Chinese philosophy of religion. His ideas are introduced into China by Zhicheng Wang's team through an adaptation strategy of "translation + interpretation + comparison", triggering an "ontological debate" between Guanghu He and Zhicheng Wang, and promoting the transformation of the study of Chinese philosophy of religion from enquiring about the ultimate Reality to the analysis of religious practices. Cupitt's thought has brought to Chinese academia both methodological innovation (interpreting Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist doctrines as forms of life wisdom through contextualism) and an upgrade in intercultural dialogue (from "conceptual analogy" to "practical resonance"). Chinese academic circles, on the one hand, affirm that Cupitt's thought offers a non-transcendent path for the modern transformation of indigenous religions, and, on the other hand, point out its limitation in weakening community functions and advocate balancing it with the doctrine of "the Tao and its instruments are inseparable". The interaction between Cupitt's thought and Chinese traditional wisdom can foster mutual enlightenment and offer avenues to address the crisis of meaning in modernity.
9. **Living Through the Death of God and Resurrection in Spirit.** David Biernot reassesses Don Cupitt's theological legacy in light of contemporary political, cultural, and religious developments. Rejecting claims that recent resurgences of religious nationalism inaugurate a new "dispensation" that renders Cupitt obsolete, the chapter

argues for his continued relevance as a qualified post-secular thinker. Placing Cupitt in dialogue with Georg W.F. Hegel, the chapter shows how both thinkers confronted the shared malady of modernity marked by the death of God, reworking religious meaning through language-oriented accounts of Spirit and practice. Cupitt's theological non-realism is presented as compatible with contemporary scientific naturalism and with the growing role of neuroscience over the past two decades, remaining intellectually viable as we enter the second quarter of the twenty-first century.